

10.0 COMMUNITY DESIGN ELEMENT

10.1 INTRODUCTION

This Community Design Element brings together the physical elements and design features of Los Gatos thereby establishing a strong sense of place and local identity. The unique characteristics that define the Town are protected and encouraged in this element. Residential, commercial and industrial design as well as landscaping, streetscape, focal points, boundaries and vistas are addressed.

Historic buildings and structures tell the story of the Town's past. Therefore, Historic Preservation is a significant aspect of the Community Design Element.

10.2 GOALS, POLICIES, IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES

ISSUE: 1

Town residents seek high quality design and construction in residential, commercial and industrial properties.

Goal:

CD.G.1.1

To preserve and enhance the Town's character through exceptional community design.

General Policies:

CD.P.1.1 Promote and protect the physical and other distinctive qualities of residential neighborhoods.

CD.P.1.2 Promote, enhance and protect the functionality and appearance of the Town's commercial areas.

CD.P.1.3 Encourage the preservation of the appearance and function of the industrial areas and the visible labor and products of labor that are evident there.

CD.P.1.4 Promote and protect viewsheds.

CD.P.1.5 Avoid abrupt changes in scale and density.

CD.P.1.6 Establish community design guidelines that promote and protect the natural amenities in the Town.

CD.P.1.7 New structures, remodels, landscapes and hardscapes shall be designed to harmonize and blend with the scale and rhythm of the neighborhood and natural features in the area.

CD.P.1.8 Building elements shall be in proportion with those traditionally in the neighborhood.

CD.P.1.9 Building, landscape and hardscape materials shall be used that will reinforce the sense of unity of a neighborhood and blend with the natural setting.

CD.P.1.10 Buildings, landscapes and hardscapes shall follow the natural contours of the property.

- CD.P.1.11 New structures or remodels that will affect existing scenic views of neighbors shall be designed so that all affected properties have equitable access to views.
- CD.P.1.12 New construction and remodels shall be encouraged to use energy- and resource-efficient and ecologically sound designs, technologies and building materials, as well as recycled materials to promote sustainability. (See Energy and Recycling sections of the Conservation Element)
- CD.P.1.13 Encourage the undergrounding of utilities on new construction and substantial remodels.

Detail Policies:

- CD.P.1.14 Minimize the visual impacts of lighting.
- CD.P.1.15 Utility connections and meters shall be located as to be visually unobtrusive from the street.
- CD.P.1.16 Roof mounted mechanical equipment shall be screened and such screening shall be considered as part of the structure for height limitations.
- CD.P.1.17 Landscaping and hardscaping shall harmonize with the existing neighborhood while meeting water conservation requirements.
- CD.P.1.18 Hardscape and formal landscape areas in hillsides shall be minimized.
- CD.P.1.19 Solid fencing over 3 feet high shall be designed to not isolate the structures from the street or shall be set back and landscaped.
- CD.P.1.20 Multiple family residential developments shall include common open space suitable for group gathering.
- CD.P.1.21 All residential developments shall include privately owned open space in proportion to the building size.
- CD.P.1.22 Minimize the number of driveway openings, or curb cuts, in new development.
- CD.P.1.23 Review properties next to community entry points when they are developed or redeveloped to reflect the gateway concept.
- CD.P.1.24 Plan street improvements such as curb cuts, sidewalks, bus stop turnouts, bus shelters, light poles, benches and trash containers as an integral part of a project to ensure safe movement of people and vehicles with the least possible disruption to the streetscape.
- CD.P.1.25 Provide for safe pedestrian circulation in parking lots without unnecessarily eliminating parking spaces.
- CD.P.1.26 Promote visual continuity through tree planting, consistent use of low shrubs and ground cover.
- CD.P.1.27 Encourage the use of landscaping (such as trees, large shrubs, trellised vines) to mitigate the effects of building mass, lower noise and reduce heat generation.

Implementing Strategies:

CD.I.1.1 Design Review: Design standards shall be considered for every project. These standards shall be periodically reviewed and updated. Staff reports shall include a design review that refers to but is not limited to the following:

- A. Building architecture (in keeping with the surrounding neighborhood)
- B. Utilities
- C. Landscaping
- D. Streets and sidewalks
- E. Signing
- F. Lighting
- G. Historical significance
- H. Disabled accessibility
- I. Siting / Orientation
- J. Materials and color
- K. Functionality
- L. Energy efficiency

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning

CD.I.1.2 Periodically inspect all commercial landscaping to ensure that approved landscaping is maintained.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Parks

CD.I.1.3 Require careful review of all landscaping to insure that it is aesthetically pleasing, lush and full, compatible with its neighborhood and natural environment, and water conserving.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Parks

CD.I.1.4 Adopt design guidelines for landscaping; including hardscape.

Time Frame: 2001 - 2002

Responsible Party: Parks

CD.I.1.5 An education and outreach program shall be used to inform neighborhoods, realtors, developers, architects, and designers about the Town's design guidelines and standards, including providing the relevant guidelines and standards as part of project application packages.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning

CD.I.1.6 Native plant species. Landscaping plans shall maximize the use of native and/or drought resistant plant materials.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Parks

CD.I.1.7 Trees. Landscaping plans should maximize the use of trees for climate control, screening, shading (esp. parking lots) and aesthetics.

Time Frame: On-going
Responsible Party: Parks

CD.I.1.8 Tree species. Encourage mixtures of tree species, both deciduous and evergreen, to screen projects, to add variety, to create a more natural environment and to avoid future problems of insect infestation or other blights that might destroy the desired tree cover.

Time Frame: On-going
Responsible Party: Parks

CD.I.1.9 Maintenance contracts. A five-year maintenance contract to protect newly planted and existing trees shall be required as a condition of approval for all development applications except single family dwellings.

Time Frame: On-going
Responsible Party: Parks

CD.I.1.10 Consider amending Zoning Ordinance regarding fences adjacent to streets.

Time Frame: 2002 - 2003
Responsible Party: Planning

CD.I.1.11 The Los Gatos Boulevard Plan shall be used to evaluate projects within the area it covers.

Time Frame: On-going
Responsible Party: Planning

CD.I.1.12 Evaluate projects against applicable design guidelines.

Time Frame: On-going
Responsible Party: Planning

CD.I.1.13 Consider amending the zoning ordinance to apply hillside standards to sloping lots, even if zoned other than HR or RC.

Time Frame: On-going
Responsible Party: Planning

CD.I.1.14 Consider amending the zoning ordinance to define sloping lot

Time Frame: On-going
Responsible Party: Planning

ISSUE: 2

The Town places special emphasis on design and siting of development in the hillsides.

Goal:

CD.G.2.1 To preserve the natural beauty and ecological health of the hillsides.

Policies:

- CD.P.2.1 Projection above the ridge view protection line is prohibited. The plans for each house shall indicate its height in relationship to the ridge view protection line when viewed from specific vantage points.
- CD.P.2.2 Consideration shall be given to the siting homes for privacy, livability, protection of natural plant and wildlife habitats and migration corridors, adequate solar access and wind conditions. Siting should take advantage of scenic views but should not create significant ecological or visual impacts affecting open spaces, public places, or other properties.
- CD.P.2.3 Mass Grading in New Construction: Follow natural land contour and avoid mass grading in new construction. Grading large, flat yard areas shall be avoided. Siting of the house must consider natural topography.
- CD.P.2.4 Reducing Visible Mass: Effective visible mass shall be reduced through such means as stepping structures up and down the hillside, a maximum of two stories shall be visible from every elevation following the natural contours, and limiting the height and mass of the wall plane.
- CD.P.2.5 Adjacent parcels shall provide an uninterrupted band of useable segments for wildlife corridors and the recreational use of others, if applicable.
- CD.P.2.6 Hillside Landscaping: Hillside landscaping shall be designed with the following goals in mind:
- A. Preservation and use of native/natural vegetation.
 - B. Minimization of formal landscaping and hardscape.
 - C. Siting formal landscaping and hardscape close to the house.
 - D. Following the natural topography.
 - E. Preservation of natural trees, vegetation, and wildlife habitats and migration corridors.
- CD.P.2.7 Fencing: Fences shall be of open design unless required for privacy. A minimal amount of the land shall be enclosed by fences over five feet high.
- CD.P.2.8 Lighting: Outdoor lighting shall be limited. Lighting allowed shall be of low intensity and for safety purposes. Lighted sports courts shall be prohibited. The effects of indoor lights should be studied and reduced if found to be excessive.
- CD.P.2.9 Update the Hillside Design Standards.

Implementing Strategies:

- CD.I.2.1 Adopt and continually update exceptional hillside design standards and guidelines. Expand the issues currently addressed by the Town's Hillside Design Standards to include siting, orientation, materials, size, fencing, lighting, wildlife habitats and migration corridors, and the amount of formal landscaping and hardscape that may be installed.

Time Frame: 2001

Responsible Party: Planning

- CD.I.2.2 Evaluate projects as to how the built environment naturally blends into the surrounding landscape in such areas as: scale, materials, hardscape, lights and landscape.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning

- CD.I.2.3 To revise the Town's grading policy to be consistent with the General Plan and Hillside Specific Plan.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning

- CD.I.2.4 Determine maximum buildable slope and consider a regulation for it.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning

- CD.I.2.5 Consider down zoning hillside properties to lower densities.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning

ISSUE: 3

The Town places a high priority on preserving its historic structures and neighborhoods.

Goal:

- CD.G.3.1 To preserve significant historic and architectural features within the Town.

Policies:

- CD.P.3.1 Avoid demolishing historic buildings.
- CD.P.3.2 Encourage adaptive reuse of residential, commercial, or public buildings.
- CD.P.3.3 Promote rehabilitation of damaged historic structures consistent with the policies of the Safety Element in conformance with the State Historic Building Code.
- CD.P.3.4 Encourage the preservation and restoration of historic sites, and structures and architecturally valuable structures.
- CD.P.3.5 Encourage the preservation, maintenance and reuse of existing buildings.

- CD.P.3.6 Renovations or remodels of historic structures shall be architecturally consistent and compatible with the original structure.
- CD.P.3.7 New structures within the historic areas shall be designed to blend and harmonize with the neighborhood.

Implementing Strategies:

- CD.I.3.1 Public Information Program: Establish public information programs designed to make owners of historic structures and the general public aware of the value of historic buildings and to encourage their maintenance.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning

- CD.I.3.2 Impacts on Historic Landmarks: All projects shall consider any adverse effect to historic landmarks and features on or in the vicinity of the proposed project.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning

- CD.I.3.3 Tax benefits: Provide information about tax law benefits for rehabilitation of historic structures.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning

- CD.I.3.4 Historic Codes: Continue to use Town Code provisions to protect and designate historic sites. Encourage the use of the State Historic Building Code for any structural changes to an historic building.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning

- CD.I.3.5 Protections for historic sites: Require any development having potential adverse impacts on historical sites and/or features on or in the vicinity of the site to:

- A. Accommodate the historical structure or feature, or
- B. Mitigate potential adverse impacts to a level acceptable to the Town, or
- C. Relocate the historical feature to an appropriate site.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning and Deciding Body

- CD.I.3.6 Code Review: Periodically review historic landmark and preservation legislation and update Town Code as necessary.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning and Historic Preservation Committee

Downtown

- CD.I.3.7 Save Historic Structures: Encourage developers to use historic structures and if not feasible encourage their donation to the Town.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning and Historic Preservation Committee

- CD.I.3.8 Provide applicants/developers with resources to assist in restoration projects.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning

ISSUE 4

Downtown is the heart of Los Gatos and must continue to reflect the small-scale character. All improvements shall be pedestrian scale and of the highest quality. Parking structures shall be low profile, depressed and include extensive screening and landscaping.

Goal:

- CD.G.4.1 To preserve the character of downtown Los Gatos and the quality of life for its citizens.

Policies:

- CD.P.4.1 Provide for a pedestrian-oriented downtown core.
- CD.P.4.2 Establish and maintain strong boundaries between the commercial area and adjacent residential neighborhoods.
- CD.P.4.3 Preserve and enhance the appearance of the CBD through design improvements.
- CD.P.4.4 Strengthen architectural design controls related to the rehabilitation of buildings within the Town's CBD.
- CD.P.4.5 Provide directional signs to identify the downtown area and to guide residents and visitors to downtown destinations.
- CD.P.4.6 Preserve historically, architecturally or socially significant buildings.
- CD.P.4.7 Downtown signs and graphics should maintain the Town's small-scale appearance.
- CD.P.4.8 Parking structures and facilities shall have a low profile and be screened from view, and be aesthetically pleasing.
- CD.P.4.9 Develop and promote pedestrian-, bicycle-, and transit-oriented supplements to parking.

Implementing Strategies:

CD.I.4.1 Commercial Core: The area along Santa Cruz and University Avenues between Saratoga Avenue and West Main Street should receive special treatment to accent it as the Town's commercial core or CBD. This treatment to enhance user comprehension and enjoyment of this area should include:

- A. Continuation of the Town's downtown paving and tree planting system within the CBD.
- B. Specialized lighting and sign systems to distinguish this area.
- C. Architectural design controls related to the rehabilitation of buildings within the CBD through consistency and compatibility of scale, massing, materials, color, texture, reflectivity, openings, and other details.
- D. Design controls on private signs to enhance the commercial core area.
- E. Controls to ensure that the new buildings built on existing vacant parcels strengthen the form and image of the CBD.
- F. Orientation signs to guide those seeking access to the Town's parking areas and other destinations.
- G. Modifications and improvements to the Town Plaza to heighten its role as the southern visual anchor and gateway to the downtown area.

Time Frame: 2000 - 2005

Responsible Party: Planning, Parks, Public Works and Redevelopment Agency

CD.I.4.2 Building Relationship to Street and Pedestrian Ways: Mid-block pedestrian arcades linking Santa Cruz Avenue with existing and new parking facilities in the CBD along the right-of-way facilitate pedestrian access. These arcades must include crime prevention elements such as good sight-lines and lighting systems for security.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning and Police

CD.I.4.3 Building Materials: The exterior building materials in the CBD should be consistent with those used in existing, tastefully executed buildings in near proximity.

Time Frame: On-going

Responsible Party: Planning

CD.I.4.4 Pedestrians: Specify building designs and site plans that encourage and enhance pedestrian circulation.

Time Frame: 2000 - 2005

Responsible Party: Planning

CD.I.4.5 Historic Features: Identify valuable and historical architectural styles and features.

Time Frame: 2000 - 2005

Responsible Party: Planning and Historic Preservation Committee

- CD.I.4.6 Landscaping: Develop landscaping schemes that heighten user understanding of Downtown. Trees and plants shall be approved by the Superintendent of Parks and Forestry for the purpose of meeting criteria, including climatic conditions, maintenance, year round versus seasonal color change (blossoms, summer foliage, autumn color), special branching effects and other considerations.
- Time Frame: 2000 - 2005
Responsible Party: Parks
- CD.I.4.7 Parking Facilities Relation to Grade: Parking facilities in Downtown Los Gatos shall be at or below grade. A parking structure on the Farwell Lot (Lot 6) may be acceptable with one level above grade. All parking facilities must exhibit excellence in design, minimize impacts on adjacent property, and be consistent with the Town's character.
- Time Frame: On-going
Responsible Party: Engineering and Public Works
- CD.I.4.8 Parking Facilities Design Criteria: Establish adequate design criteria to ensure parking facilities that are aesthetically pleasing, well designed for parking maneuverability, properly signed for ease of use, properly located to attract traffic as it approaches the downtown, and through the use of landscaping, berms, screening and the like, as inconspicuous as possible.
- Time Frame: On-going
Responsible Party: Engineering, Public Works and Parks
- CD.I.4.9 Pedestrian Orientation and Parking Demand Management: Conduct a feasibility and design study to develop and implement programs for pedestrian, bicycle, and transit-oriented systems to supplement parking in the CBD.
- Time Frame: On-going
Responsible Party: Engineering and Parks
- CD.I.4.10 Bicycle Parking: Require bicycle parking in private parking lots and provide bicycle parking in all public lots in downtown.
- Time Frame: On-going
Responsible Party: Engineering and Public Works
- CD.I.4.11 Lighting: Street walkway, and building lighting should be designed so as to strengthen and reinforce the Town's downtown character.
- Time Frame: On-going
Responsible Party: Engineering and Public Works
- CD.I.4.12 Signs: Public signs, directional signs, informational signs and others within the CBD should be so designed as to easily communicate their messages, and to be so distinct in their form and color that the observer will identify them with the Central Business District.
- Time Frame: 2000 - 2005
Responsible Party: Engineering and Public Works

CD.I.4.13 Street Furniture: Street furniture and equipment, such as lamp standards, traffic signals, fire hydrants, street signs, telephones, mail boxes, refuse receptacles, bus shelters, drinking fountains, planters, kiosks, flag poles and other elements of the street environment should be designed and selected so as to strengthen and reinforce the downtown character.

Time Frame: 2000 - 2005

Responsible Party: Engineering and Public Works

CD.I.4.14 Streetscape Plan: Implement the Downtown Streetscape and Plaza Master Plans.

Time Frame: 2000 - 2005

Responsible Party: Parks, Public Works and Redevelopment Agency